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Putting The 'logical' into Epistemological Stance

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Professional Doctorate Keynote Lecture

Today's Session

- A **non scary** introduction to epistemology for the new Prof Doc cohort
- A **refresher** (hopefully) for the second years...(no pressure there then!)
- A chance to **break down the ambiguity** that often surrounds the term epistemology and that is often used as a barrier to accessibility
- To replace (some of) that ambiguity with **certainty** in our understanding of **the logic of epistemological stance**
- An **open forum** for questions on all things epistemological / ontological / philosophical



Started my Professional Career in 1992 as a Podiatrist and still Learning!

- Lecturer at Durham School of Podiatric Medicine
- Principal Lecturer in Learning & Teaching
- Founding Fellow of the Faculty of Podiatric Medicine (Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow)
- Fellow of the College of Podiatry and General Practice
- Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
- National Teaching Fellow
- Reader in Pedagogic Practice at the University of Sunderland
- Visiting Professor at the University of Cumbria





Back to Today...

Why should epistemological stance matter to us?
&
Why does it feel like a hard nut to crack?

The best answers I could think of.....

It is *fundamental to reflection and reflexivity* processes in the Prof Doc - regardless of your professional background or proposed research area!

Ways of knowing (*epistemologies*) tell you ways of framing paradigms (*methodologies*) and then undertaking them in practice (*methods*) - they originate from the ways we perceive reality (*ontology*)



Key things to remember about work excellence and liminal academic shifts...

What you are doing in your workplace at the moment (no matter how good) is not sufficient, because for the doctorate you are expected to do three key things (doctoral 'trinity' rule):

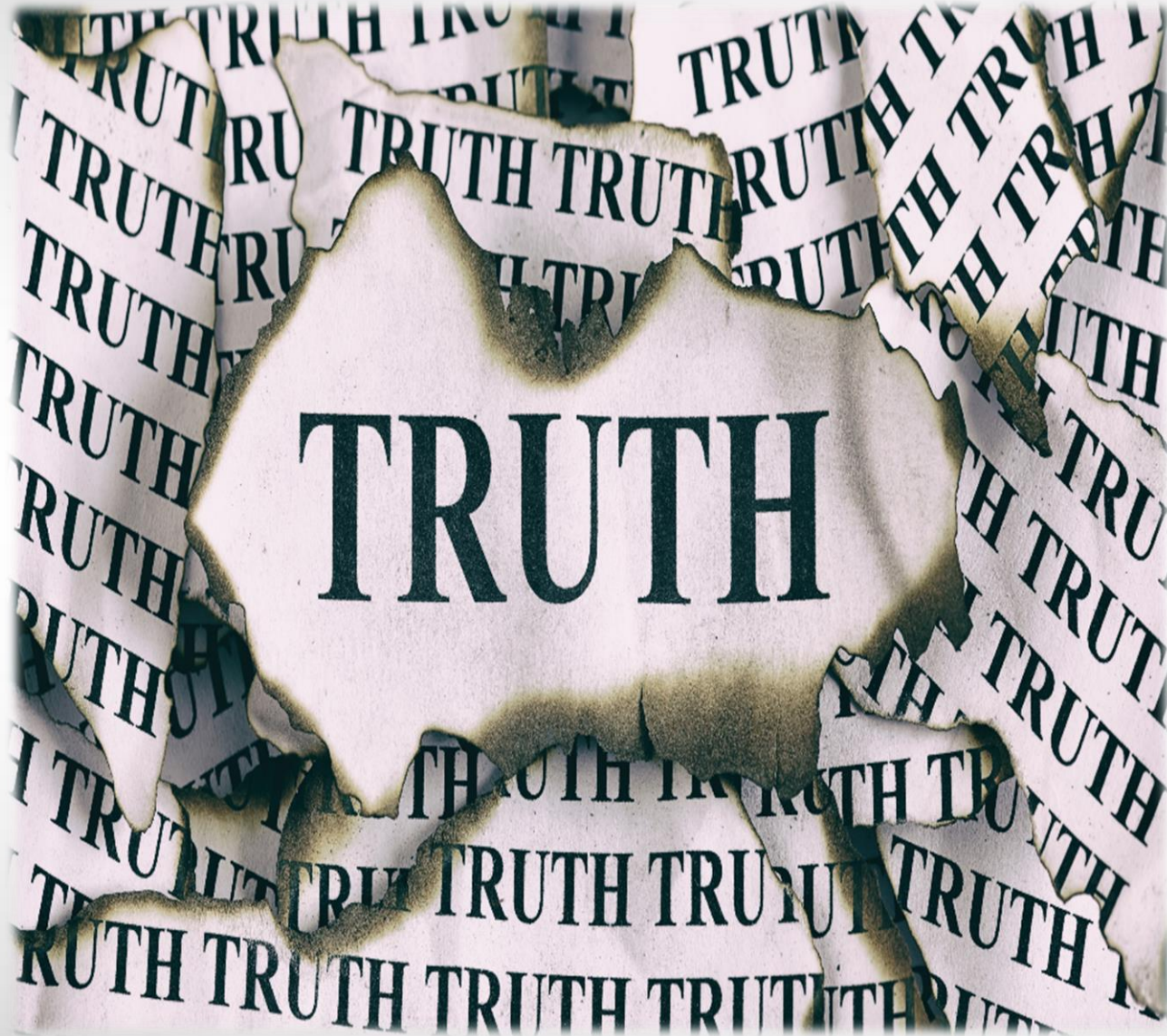
- Produce new knowledge (*i.e. unique contribution*)
- Via systematic enquiry (*i.e. recognised methodology*)
- Academically underpinned (*i.e. academic literature*)



Your professional work will be the *vehicle* and is likely to provide you with much of the data for your doctorate, but you have to *develop it to doctoral level*



(Perceived Reality versus Actual Reality) x 7 Billion Versions

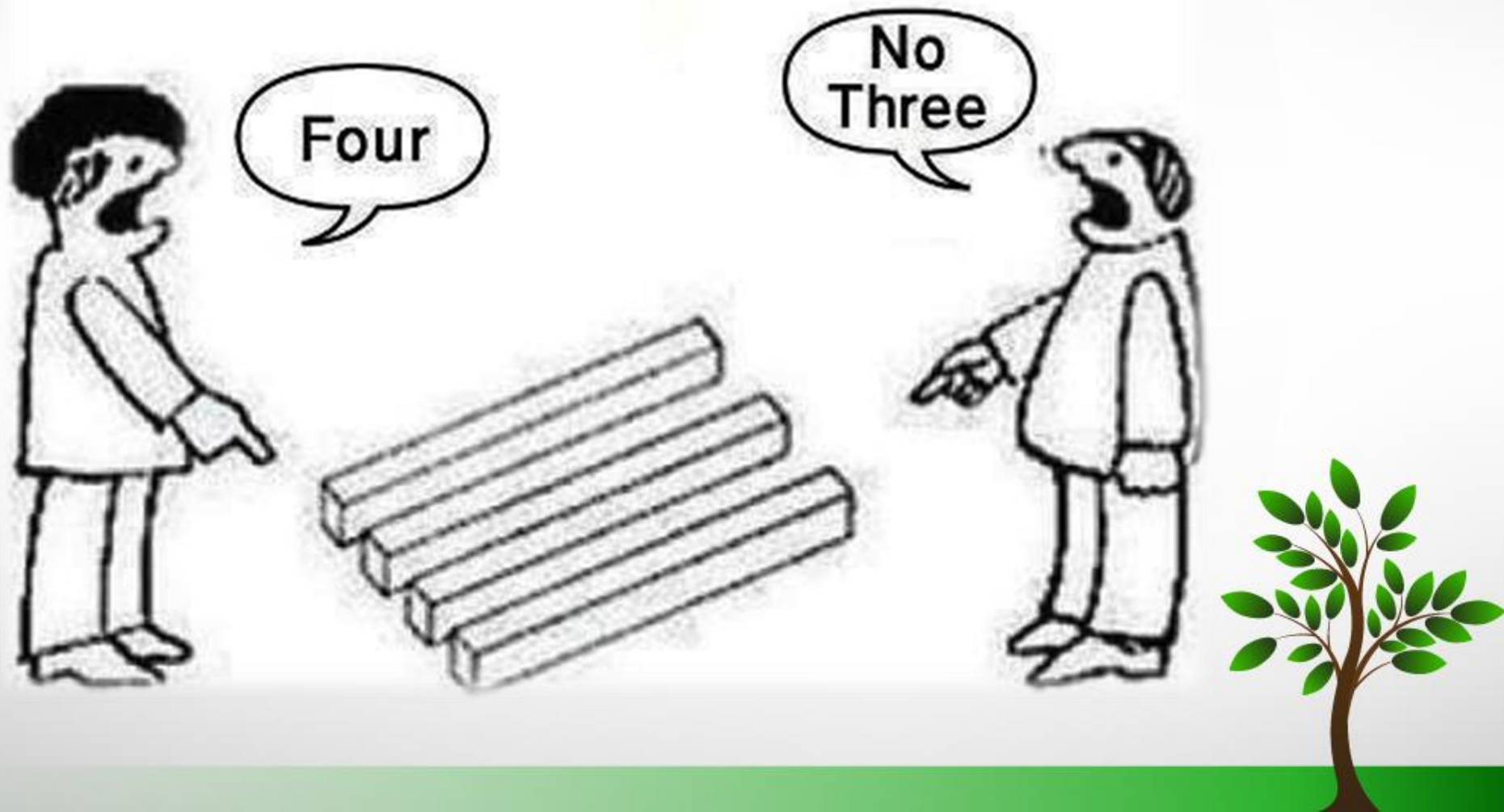


Where
does
ontology
fit in a Prof
Doc...?



Challenging Assumptions via Lenses of Reality

It is really confusing!!!



Solve it!



Three people are found dead in a cabin on a mountainside

How did they Die?



Solve it!



It is a hot August afternoon in the living room of this old haunted Victorian mansion house in Dorset. The 7-foot window at the rear of the house is open and the curtains are blowing in the breeze generated by a thunderstorm during the night. On the floor lie the bodies of Lady Joan and Lord Stanley. They are surrounded by puddles of water and broken glass. Close your eyes and then picture the scene in your mind. Neither Lady Joan or Lord Stanley has any clothes on.

How did they Die?



Solve it!



A man and his son were rock climbing on a particularly dangerous mountain when they slipped and fell. The man was killed, but the son lived and was rushed to a hospital. The old surgeon looked at the young man and declared, 'I can't operate on this boy: he is my son.'

How Can This Be?



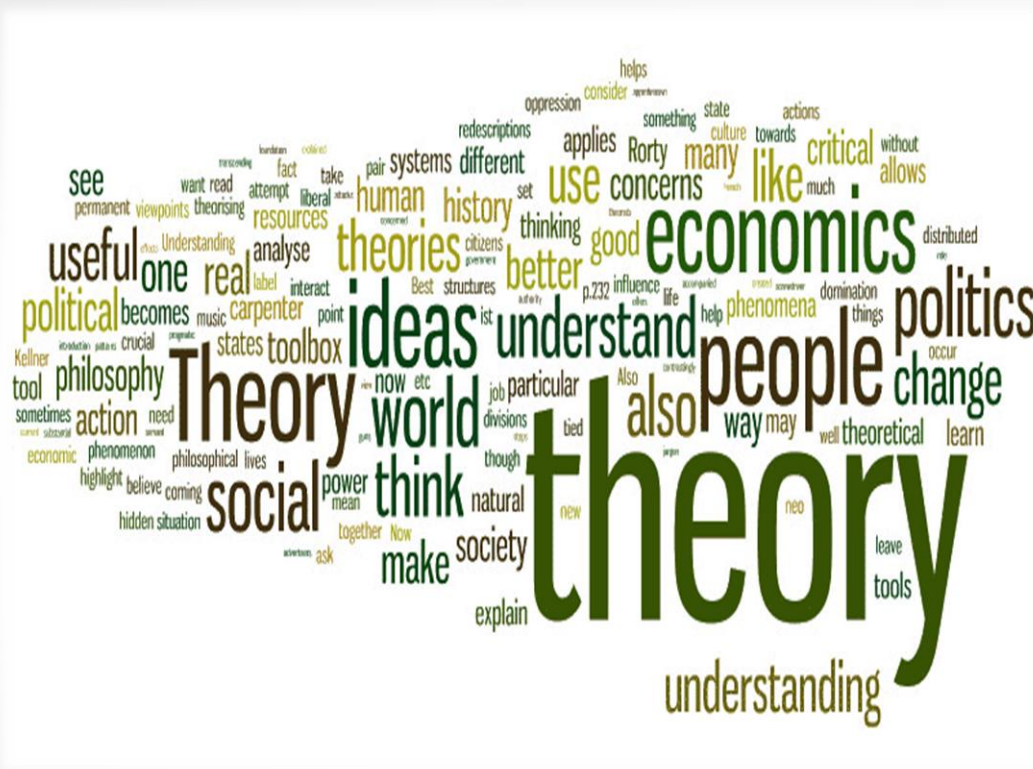
In a Nutshell



- Reflexivity means interpreting one's own interpretations
- Looking at ones perspectives from other perspectives
- Turning a self-critical eye to one's own authority as an interpreter and articulator of knowledge



You might consider 'Reflexive Turnings'...



- Marxist theories of knowledge and power
- Feminist theories of situated knowledge
- Constructionist theories of scientific knowledge
- Post structuralist critiques of universalisms
- Post-colonial theories of racial/imperial stance



Key Questions to Ponder for the Professional Doctorate...

- Do people speak about issues of reflexivity in your discipline/area of research?
- In which context does reflexivity become a problem?
- What are the prevailing attitudes towards theories of reflexivity and reflexive knowledge production in the field?
- Why /why not do you consider yourself to be a reflexive researcher?
- Do you need to be reflexive? At what level? Epistemological / Methodological or Political?



Key Questions to Ponder for the Professional Doctorate...



- Introspective reflexivity
- Co-constructed reflexivity
- Epistemic reflexivity
- Methodological reflexivity
- Sociological reflexivity
- Meta-cognitive
(deconstructive) reflexivity



Tools for Knowing - Basic Refresher

Key Features of Positivist and Interpretivist Paradigms

Interpretivist	Positivist
Basic Beliefs	
Science is driven by human interest	Observer is independent
The world is socially constructed and subjective	Science is value-free
Observer is part of what is observed	The world is external and objective
Researchers	
Try to understand what is happening	Focus on facts
Develop ideas through induction from evidence	Formulate and test hypotheses
Focus on meanings	Look for causality and fundamental laws
Look at totality of each situation	Reduce phenomena to simplest elements
Preferred Methods	
Qualitative methods, such as grounded theory	Quantitative methods, such as experiments

Positivist Paradigm

Interpretivist Paradigm

Basic belief

- The world is external and objective
- Observer is independent
- Science is value-free

- The world is socially constructed and subjective
- Observer is part of what observed
- Science is driven by human interests

Researcher should:

- Focus on facts
- Look for causality and fundamental laws
- Reduce phenomena to simplest events
- Formulate hypotheses and then test them

- Focus on meanings
- Try to understand what is happening
- Look at the totality of each situation
- Develop ideas through induction from data

Preferred methods include:

- Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured
- Taking large samples

- using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena
- small samples investigated in depth or over time



Considerations for Rigorous Research

Positivist Stance

Validity

Does an instrument measure what it is supposed to measure?

Reliability

Will the measure yield the same results on different occasions (assuming no real change in what is to be measured)?

Generalisability

What is the probability that patterns observed in a sample will also be present in the wider population from which the sample is drawn?

Interpretivist Stance

Has the researcher gained full access to the knowledge and meanings of informants?

Will similar observations be made by different researchers on different occasions?

How likely is it that ideas and theories generated in one setting will also apply in other settings?



How to Determine your own Research Philosophy

- Consider your own *experiential* research/ professional identity
- Consider your *topic* (theoretical basis, research subjects, desired knowledge etc)
Read widely on *research philosophy* - there are many often contrasting and contradictory views
Engage in *philosophical debate* with peers, supervisors, yourself
- Show this in your thesis; build a case for *your own philosophical stance*
- Let this then *lead your methodology*



Things to Take Away...

1. There is no right or wrong research philosophy, but a well argued case for the one you prefer showing understanding of alternatives
2. Your research philosophy will guide your key assumptions from practice then your methodology and your overall approach to your Prof Doc
3. It's hard but vital! An understanding of your core assumptions will make you a much better researcher.



What is Reflection and how should we do it?



Where Reflection Sits with Epistemological Stance



- Producing a conception of reflection that takes account of the theory but which can also be practically applied.
- Advocating purposeful, reflexive approaches that extend beyond just a narrative account or self indulgent ramble.
- Aiding you in authenticating your narrative inquiry so that it can form the basis of the 'golden thread' of your epistemological stance.
- Personal Development and growth



A Means of....



- Deconstructing experience
- Reducing complexity for ease of understanding
- Giving emotive significance to tangible events or experiences
- Illuminating what is subconscious





Question Time

Can reflection
actually be an
intellectual
endeavour is it
just too
subjective?



Seminal Theorists & Focal Points



- John Dewey (1933): Educational implications of human mental function
- Jürgen Habermas (1971): The way humans process ideas and construct them into knowledge
- Kolb (1984): Cyclical experiential learning
- Schön (1983-7): Reflection on Professional knowledge and its development



Their Contemporaries:



- Jenny Moon (1999): Relationship Reflection has with Learning
- Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985): How emotion is neglected in reflective practice
- Cowan (1998); Brockbank and McGill (1998); Eraut (1996): Link reflection to Professional Practice



Reflexive Praxis...



- Introduce your research topic, question, purpose and methodological approach...
- Consider how different types/ degrees of critical reflection could be applied to problematise the research - stretch your imaginations and help each other...
- Where are agreements, where do practices resonate? Why are there tensions, disagreements, blockages?



Supporting Reflection Across the Prof Doc



We encourage you to examine metacognition - having awareness of your own cognitive functioning.

Contextualise professional practice amidst your own professional identity and the identity of your profession.



Epistemological Stance versus Embedded Stance



- Contemplate the distinct difference between the two in approaches to interpretive research methodology
- Consider how different types/ degrees of critical reflection could be applied to problematise the research - stretch your imaginations and help each other
- Keep it simple - don't make things unnecessarily complex



So what
about the
Viva voce
exam?



Where does epistemological stance fit into it?

Thank You for Listening!



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